

UNDERSTANDING THE FIREWISE LANDSCAPE POLICY

The purpose of the Firewise Landscape Policy (FLP) is to create defensible space around homes and other structures in Oakmont and to reduce the risk of wildfire to lives and property.

Defensible space is a managed vegetation buffer between your home and surrounding wildlands or a managed vegetation buffer between your home and your neighbor's home. Defensible space is needed to slow or stop the spread of a wildfire and it helps to protect homes from catching fire from either direct flame, radiant heat or embers. Wind blown embers can travel miles from a wildfire and are a major cause of home loss during a wildfire. Defensible space is important for the protection of firefighters and for their access to defend a home or property.

It is important to point out that the FLP's focus on defensible space with its vegetation concerns is only one part of a coupled approach in making our homes and community less risky to wildfires. The other part of the coupled approach is home hardening actions such as installing ember resistant vents. Home hardening is addressed in other venues.

Creating defensible space is important because all of Oakmont is either located or adjacent to the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) which means that all of Oakmont is at a heightened risk from wildfires. California Government Codes and the City of Santa Rosa require that property owners create a defensible space from their homes of 100 feet or up to one's property line which ever is less.

To lessen Oakmont's wildfire risks it is vital to take appropriate actions in all of Cal Fire's Defensible Space Zones: **Zone Zero** (0-5 feet from a home and attached deck), **Zone 1** (5-30 feet from a home and attached deck) and **Zone 2** (30 to 100 feet from a home and attached deck.)

Firewise landscaping is a combination of plant selection, design and maintenance that helps to create a landscape that is resistant to wildfires. FLP requirements assist in this endeavor. A firewise landscape can be aesthetically pleasing and attractive. It is not a landscape devoid of plants resembling a moonscape.

The FLP's intent is to encourage residents to take actions that make a significant difference in reducing the risk of a wildfire to a resident's home and to our community at large. To accomplish this intent the following list of FLP requirements were established.

Note: Many FLP requirements are already part of existing OVA landscape requirements. The Architectural Committee (AC) has the task of checking for compliance with the FLP and OVA landscape requirements. Residents are encouraged to contact the OVA's Architectural Office for any questions on implementation of FLP requirements for either existing landscapes or for installing new landscapes.

Note: Home owner insurance companies may have more stringent requirements than OVA's Firewise Landscape Policy.

Note: A full copy of the OVA's Firewise Landscape Policy may be found at: oakmontvillage.com/article/firewise-landscape-policy or a copy may be obtained from the OVA's Architectural Office.

1. Trees, shrubs and all plants on the entire property must be pruned to remove any dead material for fire safety and appearance.
2. All dying or dead trees and shrubs must be removed and can be replaced with new plants **with prior AC approval**.
3. No trees, shrubs, or plants listed on the OVA's Do Not Plant List are allowed within the 5-foot defensible space next to the home. Any existing trees and shrubs not on the OVA Do Not Plant List may remain in the 5-foot defensible space. These shrubs should be healthy and maintained free of dead wood.
4. No plants on the OVA Do Not Plant List shall be allowed in **new** landscaping on the remainder of the property.
5. Property owners shall remove all junipers (*Juniperus* spp.) from their entire property.
6. Lawns must be mowed, kept weed free and watered sufficiently to maintain a healthy and green appearance.
7. Wildland grasses must be cut or mowed down mechanically or with sheep to a maximum height of 4 inches annually.
8. Trees:
 - (a) Remove dead branches from trees on one's entire property while keeping the integrity of the trees.
 - (b) Limbs within 10 feet of a chimney shall be removed.
 - (c) Remove all dead and dying branches overhanging a roof.
 - (d) Healthy overhanging limbs shall be trimmed to a minimum of six-feet from the roof of a home or any other structure.
 - (e) Established trees shall be limbed to a minimum of at least 6 feet from the ground but not to exceed 1/3 of the tree height.
 - (f) Areas under tree canopies shall be maintained free of weeds and dry plant material.
 - (g) Shrubs should be pruned so they do not create ladder fuel on the property.
 - (h) Remove tree limbs that extend into the 5-foot ignition zone around the home.
 - (i) No new trees shall be planted within 10 feet of the home or within 10 feet of canopies of other trees on the property.

(j) **Exceptions to tree guidelines may be granted as deemed appropriate by A.C inspectors.**

9. The use of combustible mulch such as wood or rubber is not allowed in the 5-foot defensible space next to the house. Noncombustible rock, gravel, concrete and pavers are allowed.
10. New plantings of firewise shrubs, perennials, ground covers and flowers are allowed in the 5-foot defensible space but shall be maintained at 18" high or less and irrigated.
11. Finely shredded redwood or cedar bark, such as Gorilla hair, or rubber mulches are not allowed on the entire property and shall be removed.
Rock used as mulch between plants is exempt from the 15% rock rule calculation. Front yard plantings and side-yard street frontage plantings shall be mulched with rock, gravel, or allowed wood mulches. **The AC shall deem what are appropriate amounts of rock and wood mulch in a landscape and may grant exceptions as they deem appropriate.**
The amount of wood mulch allowed in large areas without live plants depends on the size of the lot. A study entitled Combustibility of Landscape Mulches can be obtained from the AC office. Plans must specify what rock, wood mulch, gravel, etc., color and size, is desired. A sample of mulch material must be submitted with application and must be approved by the AC.
12. New landscaping choices must be made with consideration of a plant's mature height and spread.
13. All new installations such as gates, protective patio golf screens, sheds, or a portion of fence that attaches directly to a home, and out a distance of five feet from the home, attached deck or structure, must be made of metal or approved nonflammable material.
14. Chimney spark arrestors that are code compliant are required on all wood burning fireplaces.
15. Keep gutters clean of debris. Property owners shall remove all leaves and needles from a structures' roof and rain gutters as needed to avoid accumulation.
16. All firewood and any combustible materials must be stored at least 30 feet away from the home, garage or attached deck or other structures.
17. **Note: Landscaping plans for front, side and back yards must be submitted to the Architectural Committee (AC) using the AC Application, which can be obtained from the AC office or found under Architectural on the OVA website. All landscaping projects require prior written approval by the AC before any work may begin.**
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